

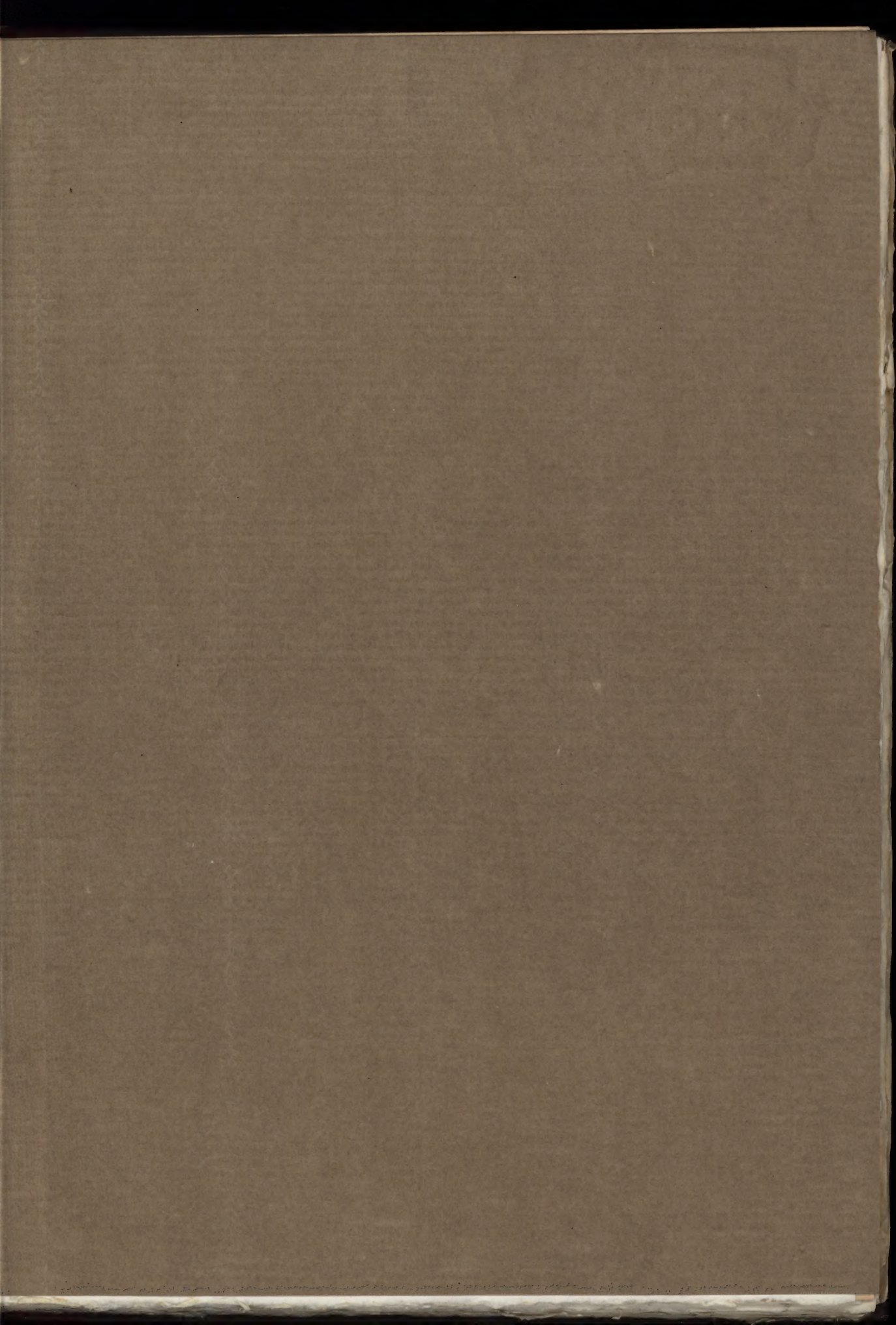
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GEORGE INNESS
BY ELLIOTT DAINGERFIELD



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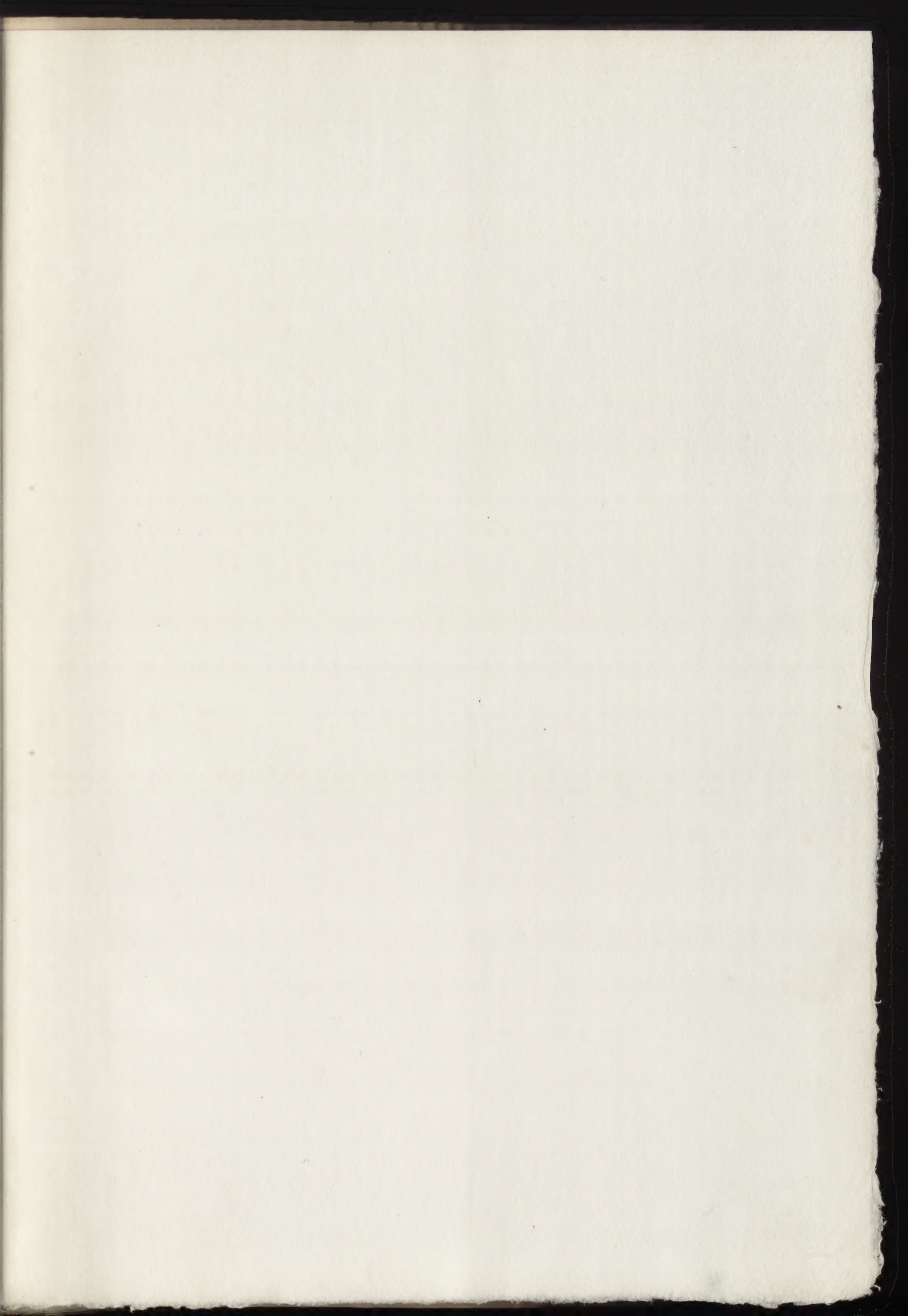


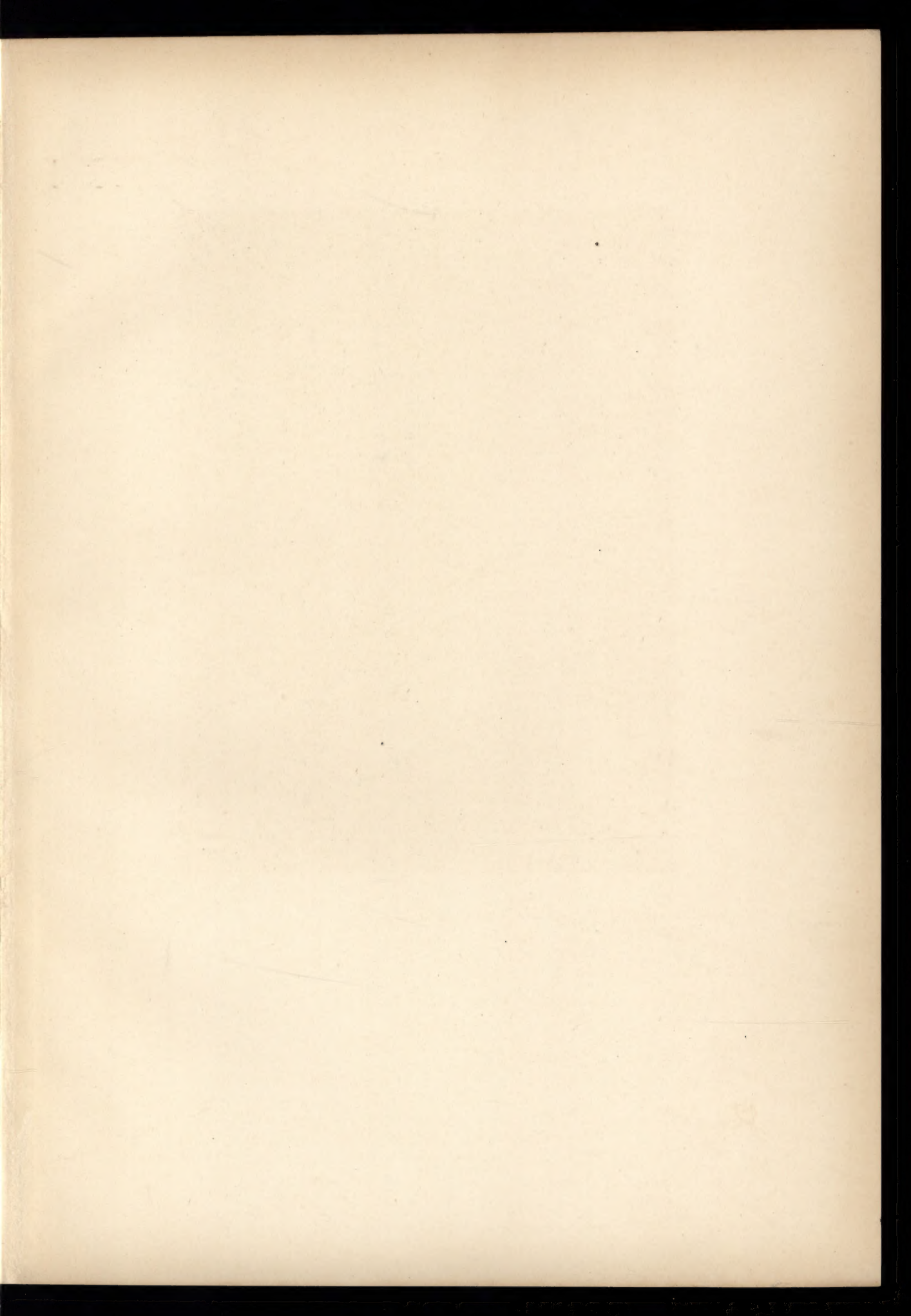


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THE DELAWARE VALLEY
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

GEORGE INNESS
THE MAN AND HIS ART

BY
ELLIOTT DAINGERFIELD

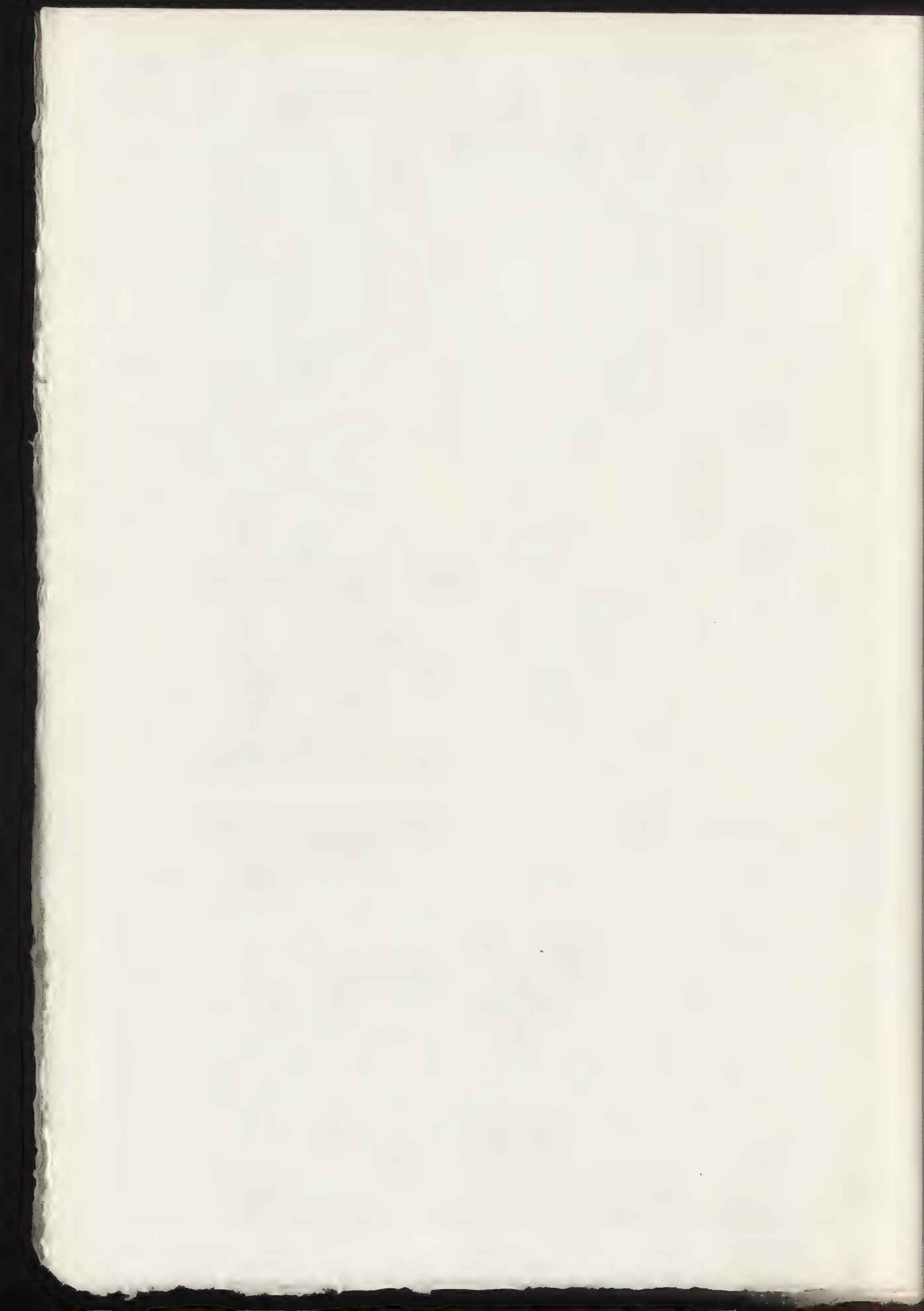


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TO MY WIFE

Art is the endeavor on the part of
Mind (Mind being the creative factor)
to express through the senses ideas of
the great principles of unity.

GEORGE INNESS.

GEORGE INNESS

PART ONE



It is no part of my intention in this work to attempt a biography of George Inness, the great landscape painter—that must be left for a stronger hand—my wish is, rather, to recall the man as I knew him, and I shall have much to say of his habits of work, of incident concerning him, with such anecdote as may illustrate the point at hand; and to make a record, so far as I may, of very much that he said of his own theories of work, his principles (the phrase was a familiar one with him) and his ideas of art, while the memory of these things—the very words—is strong upon me. Records of this sort have a value in certain quarters only less real than the work of a man, and in the case of George Inness, whose legacy of work to the American people is veritable treasure, greater in value than the general public knows, bearing a distinction that is peculiarly its own, singularly characteristic in its

opulence of our own people, the quality of value rests upon the view we get and the knowledge we gain of the mental habits, the attitude and the craft of a man whose gift, in my opinion, was more nearly genius than that of any other of our painters.

In addressing myself to this work, I encounter the difficulty of knowing just how correctly those who have known a man may judge his work. This is a question yet open, and ever will be so long as human affections and beliefs hold sway over judgment. The personality is a powerful agent when in close communication, and time and distance each exert an influence, often forcing a change or readjustment of view. I may therefore be open to criticism for overpraise, since it was my privilege to know Mr. Inness very well.

Of the work of George Inness we can have neither too intimate nor too complete a knowledge, for in his name the corner stone of American landscape art rests.

He was born when much of vital import was transpiring in the world of art, though in America but little was being done. The date of his birth is given as May 1st, 1825. He said that he was about fourteen when he first began the study that was to be life work for him, and it was at a time when

ETRETAT
COLLECTION OF LOUIS ETTLINGER





the opportunities were, at the best, but feeble for its wise development, and he found himself, even as a boy, at variance with the painters of the day. The short period of study that he had with one Regis Gignoux, a French landscape painter of little note, was of no moment in the formative development of a nature as independent as was Inness's. To mention it at all, is to give what meed of praise there may be in it to the only man who could ever claim to be the master of George Inness, and doubtless, it is the best claim the Frenchman has upon fame.

The early efforts of Inness brought him nothing but blame—"They told me I would never succeed, that I was but a fool to try to set myself against the rules laid down by my betters, and if I did not paint my trees brown in the foreground, I was sure to fail"—this, he said, was the constant criticism his work met with when he went out to paint with others. We know what that group of men were doing, and the influence under which they worked, but we shall not get a right view of Inness's art unless we glance, however slightly, at the condition of painting in the world at large when he began to make his first ventures with pencil and brush.

It is not to be doubted that in France the tenden-

cies toward a great landscape art were stronger than elsewhere. Whatever the influence of such a man as Turner, it can not be compared with that force which, entering France by way of Holland and England, had awakened an impulse and created a rebellion against shallow classicism which rapidly led to the great work done by the men of 1830. Nor is it difficult to know why that revolt was so splendidly successful. Turning from the formalities and conventionalities which beset the work of such men as David, Gérard, and their school, painters found their true source of knowledge in direct study of nature. It was long before her secrets were fully revealed, but in the work of such men as Millet, Rousseau and Corot we see the beautiful revelation which came to them, and to France—nay, the whole world felt the influence of that wave of the Renaissance which flowed across the plains of Barbizon and the meadows of d'Avray. Not staying its course there, it swept across the broad Atlantic to quicken a mind filled with like ideas, like love of nature, to whom the frail, weak, and altogether insipid effort of those about him was distasteful; they, borrowing the worst in the empty classicism of Europe, produced nothing upon which such a nature could lean, nor from which learn even the rudiments

of landscape art. Akin, without knowledge of the kinship, alike in love of nature for her own sake, and student of all those mysteries of sun and air, of cloud and sky, of rocks and trees, and of those subtler manifestations which he called "the moods of Nature," George Inness is truly one of that splendid group who gave to the world the best the world has known in landscape art.

To their tone, depth, form, and convincing logic of beauty he brought color: color such as the older masters knew in their great figure work, the blending of atmospheric delicacy with the utmost sumptuousness of the palette, finding the "fullness of tone" only in the "fullness of color." In this gift to the sum total of what had been done in France we find the key to the fascination of a fine canvass by Inness. Rebellious, not only against such art as there was near by, but against the very method of his elders, he early began a laborious, even servile copying of the landscape he saw with his own eyes, nor suffered rules or formula to guide his pencil. "I must paint things as I see them," he said, and in doing this he laid the foundation of that tremendous knowledge which enabled him to say in later years, "My forms are at my finger tips, as the alphabet is on the tongue of a school boy." In this sentence rests

the secret of that power which permitted him afterwards to express those finer qualities which he called "the moods of Nature" without reference to any superficial data.

To seize, to understand, to express! a vast power, truly! Further, it allowed him to unite all the phases of his craftsmanship with the emotional and scientific soul of him. To struggle for form is to be so occupied that other more synthetic expression is lost; to be free from this struggle is to mass all one's forces into the single channel, the expression of idea.

In all his early work the effort and intent were for objective realization. He knew, and each day's work reveals it, that in this way only could he lay the foundations of knowledge so deep that they should be permanent, build them so high that there could, afterwards, be no stumbling blocks. To rid himself of the necessity for objective thought by commanding it, to make the fingers the servants of the mind, the mind an inexhaustible storehouse, this was his struggle. No one but the painter himself, perhaps, knows the enormous amount of labor involved in such a conquest. None but a sensitive artist can understand the weariness of such a struggle—the true nature a prisoner, unable to give vent to an emo-

tion—yet it is through this very trial that great work grows. That thing in art which is done with the easy flippancy of egoistic conviction is seldom of permanent value, and skill alone will never lead one into the well-springs of beauty.

The knowledge of this truth sustained Inness, and in his early work we find no trace of the disheartened or disgruntled spirit. It is exact, literal and constructed. Exact, because it is done with a mind single to the one idea of reproduction—literal, because he sought such knowledge—constructed, because from the beginning Inness had this rare gift, the gift which is almost genius. To him composition, the division of space into agreeable masses, the balancing of parts, the value of arabesque in design, with rhythm of line, was an inherent power. His ground, sky, trees are always beautifully drawn, and the utmost conscientiousness in the study of planes and perspective is apparent in his early work. Qualities of charm, of graciousness may be lacking, but of these there is always the promise, as there is of color, which became a passion in later life. To examine his early works, is to have revelation of fidelity and love of truth in miniature-like renderings of detail even to the farthest limit of most distant horizon. There are studies of his still ex-

tant in which his view embraced, perhaps, forty degrees—a vast extent of country, containing all the multiplicity of detail of a complex landscape—rocks, hills, trees, forests, stream, towering mountains, and all the incident of life such a scene would have, and every detail is scientifically and exactly rendered as to space, proportion and plane. This does not prove anything artistically, since great art comes from right seeing, rather than vividness, of vision, but we can readily understand what treasure of knowledge was being stored away by such a worker. He owes no debt to his contemporaries, unless it be that excellent thing of knowing what not to do; their elaboration was by set rule, recipe; his, by a penetrating grasp of principles, of laws, and if he formulated them only to change with greater experience, the course of his study was ever the same and his research unflagging.

To older schools and artists of other times he frankly went, studying in them method and style. Whether he saw their work here in America, or not until his first trip abroad, matters little. In the Dutchmen of the great period he recognized masters, and unhesitatingly appropriated what was good for him to know. As, also, with certain of the Englishmen—Constable, Gainsborough, Richard

Wilson. There is in the possession of a well-known collector a large canvas of this period which is a most curious and interesting combination of the fidelity of the Dutchmen, coupled with the breadth of the Englishmen, which fully illustrates his power of assimilation. A gentleman once brought to his studio a small canvas which he had bought as an Inness, wanting the painter to verify it. We examined the canvas with care—a picture of full-leaved trees, with rocks, and a roadway beneath, a tiny figure of a white-shirted man was prone on the ground. It would have been quite possible to count the leaves, or to number the weed forms, so exactly, to the point of minuteness, was each thing painted. Mr. Inness could not remember the picture. "Leave it, leave it," he said, "I'll try to think it up." Later, he said to me—"I remember that picture, I was thinking much of Hobbema when I painted it." It is certainly not to be considered a weakness that he should thus go to others for knowledge. Some such course has always been thought wise, and there can be no other meaning in the custom of requiring art students to copy the works of the masters. We all know that such close study invariably discovers, to the intelligent student, principles and beauties of form, color and composition

which more casual study will not reveal. In the proper study, then, by Inness of the great masters, in his willingness to be influenced by them, there was no servile desire to imitate, but the finer wish to discover beauty along those paths their maturer training had led them, and it indicates his strength that he could do this with no loss to the individuality of his own work. Nor was he long in digesting knowledge so obtained, and we see him speedily producing those remarkable transcripts of American scenery which first drew attention to his name. Wide reaches of field and meadow, the business of the harvest, grazing cattle—the rush of trains, flowing streams under broadly-lit skies—all typical American scenes. Such pictures brought him many commissions.

A very perfect example of this type of picture is the beautiful "Golden Hour" in the Hearn Collection, Metropolitan Museum, and in it, also, is evidence of the power he was gaining in the expression of beautiful light and atmospheric effects.

He told me of doing a set of these pictures for the Erie Railroad people about the time that road was finished, which were to be reproduced and used in advertising. Many years later he found one of these huge canvases in a dim little shop in

APPROACHING STORM
THE CITY ART MUSEUM, ST. LOUIS





Mexico City, which he gleefully bought for a few Mexican dollars.

These works were only practice in the drudgery of preparation. They were not himself—not expressions of the ego in him which strove, and succeeded later in giving to the world visions of landscape beauty unlike any that had preceded them. Only then does the true man appear, and any real analysis which is to be made must find him there and follow him to the end.

That period, when, after a visit to Florence, and constant intercourse with Page, the artist, he became deeply interested in religious matters and especially the doctrine of Swedenborg, and during which he painted strange allegorical canvases of the "City Set in the Sky," the "Valley of the Cross" and others, is merely an excursion aside, a momentary putting away of the real intention, and in the total of his art will not be taken with too great seriousness, though the ideas then formed continued a real influence throughout his life. Of a deeply religious nature, though never devotional—forms and ceremonies were not for him—yet being highly emotional and easily excited, he could not fail to be an experimentalist in religion as in art—forever seeking the right by devious trials both in execution and in the appli-

cation of those principles which underlay all his knowledge. Such a nature could not long be content with objectivity. Perhaps it is not too much to say that the ultimate effort of such a nature must be for synthetic expression, and this was the goal, the final reach of his desire.

In this brief glimpse of the earlier portion of Inness's life, I have tried to state the simple, but extremely significant fact that he built well because he was content to work hard. There was no ready-made skill in this great master, and the habits then founded were his best friends—even if at times they were taskmasters in later life. And I have emphasized the point, because he believed so intensely that knowledge must come before power, and if his life is to help others who paint, they must start fair, and with this impression well in mind.

We may then go on to the days of freedom for creative art, days when he painted with fullest genius—the trained and ready artist.

PART TWO

THIS emancipation from the great restraint of student life, of exact and objective renderings, is most finely shown in the very precious canvas now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art

—the “Delaware Valley.” In this picture he advances far into the field of his real power. There is all the old conviction of form, even to elaboration. The extent of country is wide, and far reaching, giving full opportunity for that aerial perspective of which he later became master. We find him here very truly a companion of the men of Barbizon. Study, for a moment, the foreground—there are beautiful textures of rock and weed and earth, touched in with vigor and a sure brush, the color laid on heavily and much manipulated for the very sake of its texture, the gradations of plane being aided by this as well as by the truth of tone. Valley, mount and sky fall into their true places, each is properly enveloped in its just quantity of atmosphere and the sky with its drooping fog cloud is rightly seen through its proper amount of airy envelope. This is not achieved by great masses of form and color as in later work, but by the most patient adjustment of every value, small and great, until the canvas stands before us a unit in its warm, umberish tone. For by this time in his art, Inness has possessed himself of the organ pipes of tone. After some years, when he saw this picture again, he found fault with it, called it “labored,” “over-elaborated”—he felt the forms were “petty,” (a criticism he was forever mak-

ing against Rousseau and Millet,) and wished for more color. "If I had it for a little while, I could make it," he said unctiously. What would have become of the picture! For us it is precious in its own beauty and we may be glad to retain it in its first condition, turning with satisfaction to later things for those unctious beauties he knew so well how to paint. The "Delaware Valley" reveals to us that phase of the artist's nature which declares him a poet. The execution is scientific in its precision, but the completed work is a poem of valley and mountain-side, with its drama of swiftly stooping, ever changing sky. The subtle thunder reverberates through the hills, and the rush of shadow is upon the world. There is no picture that I can recall of Inness's which shows so fully the blend of scientist and poet, of student and master.

A fine example of this transitive period is "The Rainbow" in the collection of Mr. F. L. Babbott. Again, we may study his love of storm cloud, but more particularly the *balance* of the composition. The wise placing of the cows, the right spotting of the hay-wagon and the figures—the incident of the church spire—all these are touches by an artist who knew the accents most suited to the beauty of his theme.

Until far into his life there were many struggles with these contending forces—the picture of today being still student-like and objective, that of tomorrow a dream, delicate and ideal.

There were seeming contradictions even in the physical make up of the man; though slender, and, as the years beset him, with a slight stoop in the shoulders, yet he had an immense capacity for work. The only inference, therefore, is that he forever taxed his nervous strength to supply force for the hours and hours of work—often at white heat, which was his habit. No one would have called him a handsome man, I think, yet the head was leonine, with its great mass of dark, waving hair, which at times, when under excitement, he would throw off from his forehead; and none could escape the fascination of his intense eyes, though always in later years they shone behind spectacles.

His beard was somewhat scant, and slender in shape, and his every movement suggestive of extreme energy. This was the general impression of Mr. Inness's appearance when I first knew him in the middle eighties.

Never in art was there a brain in which dwelt such tumultuous and contending emotions. Gentle as a child in his sympathies, and stormy as his

own thunder-clouds in his dislikes, he was as little patient with himself or his work when faults obtruded as with others. He destroyed ruthlessly in the effort to reach better, greater results. Nothing offended him like weakness in a picture—"Pea-soup," he would say, or "Dishwater," and it mattered nothing where the blow fell. On one occasion he was taken to a dealer's to see a group of landscapes by a much advertised French painter. I shall not forget the out-thrust of his lower lip, and the intense tone—"Dishwater! thin as dishwater!" and he was not to be turned from his position. Swift as that judgment was, I am quite sure that the conviction of the years will bear it out.

The same exact phrase fell from his lips when I admired a lovely, tender Spring landscape of his own. Bitterly he said it. The picture was full of soft, gray greens and delicate tree forms, and in the sky the pale white moon of the morning, when it is far on the wane. Having delivered himself of this criticism of himself, Inness thrust his thumb into a mass of crude chrome yellow and smeared it on the moon. "Stay there now," he said to it, "until I make you look white!" Painters will understand what that problem was—the building up, intensifying, strengthening of all the values

and colors; but this he did with splendid courage, and the picture came out just as lovely, just as Spring-like and refined, but stronger—and the pale moon hid itself in the mellow atmosphere of a Spring sky.

This somewhat erratic and intense method may have lost to the world some good pictures, (it is a common saying among painters that Inness has painted out more good pictures than anyone else ever painted) but it was his way, and doubtless one of the very rungs by which he climbed the ladder of his present fame.

The quality of courage about his work was a very dominant one with Inness. He was absolutely fearless in his treatment of his canvases, however near finish they might be, or however delicate the degree of finish. That timidity which characterizes some painters, making them fearful lest some already completed details be lost, was wholly absent in Inness. The work must be finished as a whole, never in part. "It must be as complete as a portrait by Rembrandt," he would say, and if at the last moment he discovered a weakness, a "hitch," or a falsely adjusted principle, the treatment was never by a process of "patching up," but an heroic recasting of the whole—to emerge, after great labor, perhaps,

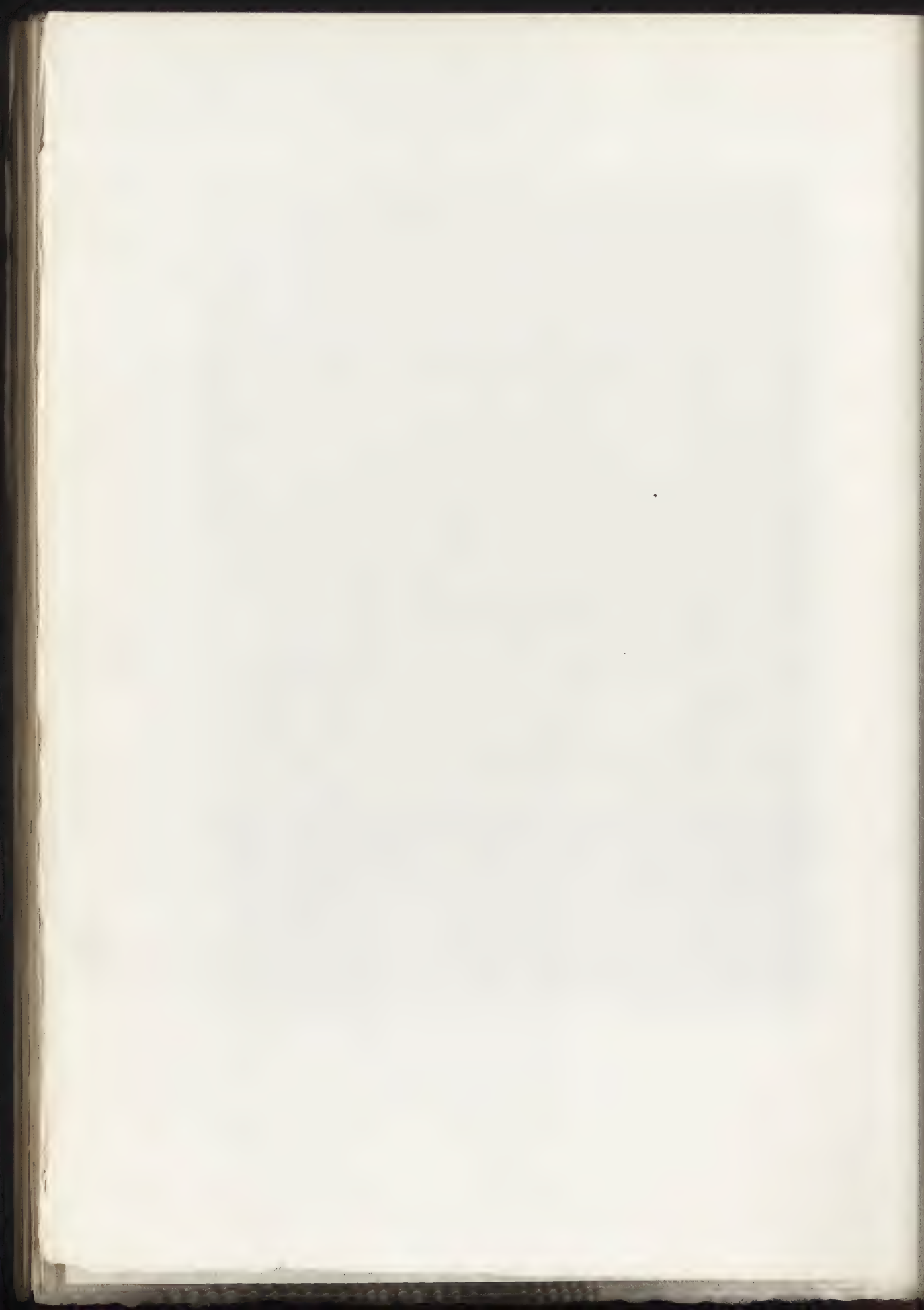
nobler and more perfect in his eyes, "pushed a little farther" as he would say. Sometimes, though rarely, the particular work was lost, and yet, who may say how great the gain to the man's power in having made the effort.

On one occasion a frame came in from the maker, intended for a canvas just finished. A mistake had been made in the size; Mr. Inness sent out for a canvas, and set to work with energies at fever heat to paint "at a sitting" a picture for the new frame. Late that afternoon he came for me to see the result. He was very excited, and well might he be. The bare canvas of the morning was the most brilliant, dazzling piece of open daylight possible to conceive. Two great trees rose from the very near left foreground, their roots reaching into a soft, marshy bit of ground, with large weeds beautifully drawn and placed, in which a solitary crane stood silently; in the background a great earth and rock cliff rose almost to the top of the canvas; against the bit of blue sky stood a boy with a gun, his white shirt catching the sunlight—that was all—simple and untortured in composition, but so radiant in color that it was, indeed, veritable daylight. There had not been time for anything but direct painting, no glazes, no building up of textures by repeated paintings.

THE RAINBOW
COLLECTION OF FRANK L. BABBOTT







The textures were had by a feat of pure brush handling, and the extremest of the modern *plein air* men would have had no quarrel with him I think, though his broken tones were not evident, neither were they detached. It was a sane and radiant piece of painting by a master, done in a moment, at white heat. What became of the picture? Alas! for the answer.

One of those problems which obsessed his mind in his search for principles—scientific laws by which he might construct and complete his work, attacked him—the picture fell a victim to the problem. The trees were too near the front of the canvas—they were cut off—at once the cliff was out of proportion; a drove of red and white cows drinking was added, the color intended to give weight to the lower section of the canvas; then the cliff was changed into a mass of trees. Nothing was right, and change after change followed. The canvas became a worried and heavy work—one of the rare cases when success did not reward effort. It was a “try out” of the principle he was searching for. Many later canvases will show the calm and beauty he was trying for at that particular time.

This was the law he laid down afterward, and followed relentlessly:—From the horizon (not the

the sky line) to the nearest point—the bottom of the canvas—there shall be three great planes; the first two shall be foreground, the third, or last shall contain all the distance. The subject matter must not be within the first plane, but behind it, and whatever reaches above the horizon line, by its size and proportion becomes subject matter—therefore trees that find their plane within the first great section are too near, and perforce must be cut off at the base to force them away. So too, a figure, wherever placed, must not reach above the horizon, else it becomes subject matter and therefore a figure picture. It is an interesting postulate, and if followed logically gives beautifully balanced results.

This courage of Inness, to which we are referring, was not merely a willingness to destroy, it had other and various sides. With a landscape of exceedingly rich and powerful color, of majestic moods and infinite variety, there was no one phase which held his whole interest. He wished to know the secrets of all. No man before him, for instance, had the problem of the luxurious green of mid-summer, in a verdure as opulent, almost, as the tropics. Inness gave us a type of picture quite unknown before. Courageously he strove to render this powerful color, which artists know

THE COAST OF CORNWALL
COLLECTION OF JOHN D. CRIMMINS





to be almost impossible when it, in itself, is the theme; he yielded no particle of strength to the soothing influence of browns, grays and russets, but frankly painted the green of American field and forest with an easy, though powerful hand.

An instance of his power, and control over the difficulties involved in greens, is seen in the little picture which was the center of interest in the Thomas B. Clark sale—the “Gray, lowery Day.” The picture is vivid and fresh, the greens intense, yet never crude; the pigment laid on with a certainty as to values, color and texture that comes only from the touch of a master, and there is probably not two hour’s work on the canvas. A frank study out of doors, when the grass was wet from a morning rain.

Not always was he so successful, nor are the very large green canvases so attractive or so complete. This may come from the difficulty which besets a painter who essays *quality* upon large surfaces—and further, there is no color which is so difficult to achieve in glazes and scumbles. It is interesting, therefore to note that the pictures of Inness’s which are essentially green are nearly always pieces of direct painting. The wonderful example which is now owned in Chicago—the young girl with a white calf—is quite as extraor-

dinary as it is unusual in the variety and beauty of the greens, and these are made more intense by the contrast afforded in the color and placing of the somewhat recalcitrant white calf.

There is another example which was done under the influence of great excitement, and which illustrates not only his ability to paint directly, but is significant of the energy and enthusiasm with which he was at times moved. While walking in the fields one day in June, he was overtaken by a sweeping thunderstorm, and of course was much stirred. He hastened to the house, and as he told me himself—"I could find nothing—no canvas big enough to paint it on; in my hall there was a big picture of Mount Washington I had painted years ago, so I got a step-ladder and in two hours this picture was completed—I'll show it to you, it's coming in now." This was said to me the morning the picture was being brought in from Montclair to his New York studio. Very soon the men brought in a great ten foot canvas, still wet with the freshness of the new paint. The artist was much excited to see it and to show it, and his eagerness at such times was most delightful. The picture was indeed a storm—with rush of wind, the stoop of trees, and the shadowed presence of a convulsion of nature. We were amazed at such

a feat—the magical brush handling, knowledge, and vividness of impression. Quite entirely we lost thought of the submerged Mount Washington, until Inness, with a chuckle, pointed out its still evident outline under the new paint. I do not know what that picture was, nor how fine, but the new work was masterly and the qualities of green surprising in their value. Later on the picture was retouched (tamed a little, I should say) and is now treasured in the St. Louis Museum.

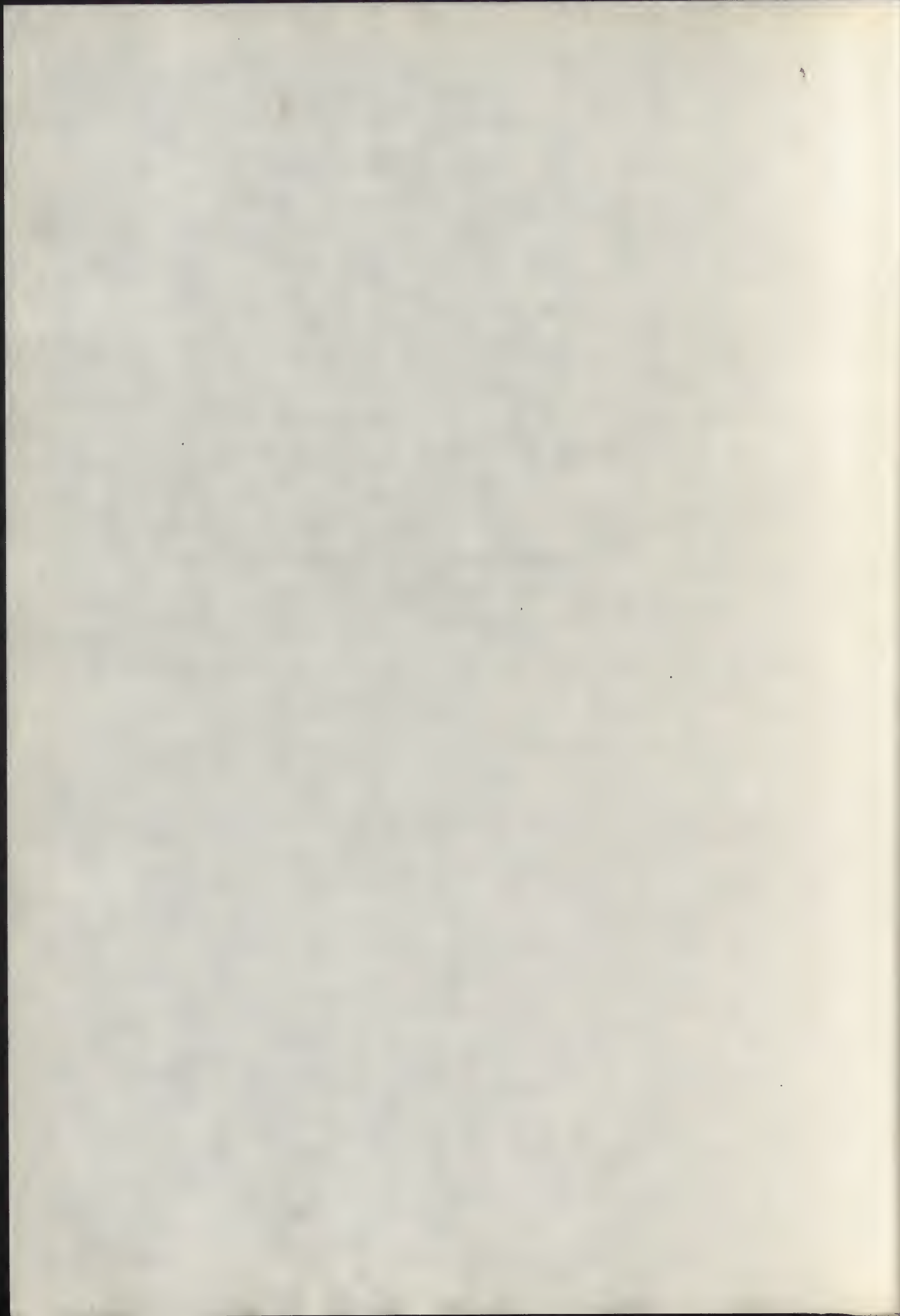
This story is valuable because it shows something of the impulsiveness of his character, his impetuosity, and the energy which is so evident in all his work. This impulsiveness led him, or misled him into strange situations at times. It would never have been safe, for instance, to let him administer medicines to himself, no matter what the trouble. A pill to be taken—one every two hours—is a very usual prescription. Inness would have taken the first one, and swallowed the rest at the second taking. At lunch one day, I had just been taking a tonic which was to be taken “a small wine glass before meals”—Inness asked what it was, and upon my saying it was for a general tired, “run down” condition, said: “If a little does good, more should do better,” and swallowed the whole bottle full.

This same impulsiveness was the cause, also, of much of the strain in his work. The "hitches" which he fought so valiantly often were the result of haste, and he frequently lamented the time lost in correcting the "mistakes." He believed, most ardently, in a true, scientific application of his principles, and at one time thought that if he might find a man who could, from the sketches, draw in his new canvases, that he could proceed to a perfect, scientific finish. He found such a man in the person of Robert Eichelberger, the young painter who later painted two or three of the very great marines in our art, and who, alas! died too soon, for his was true genius expressing itself with fine ability. This plan of Inness's did not last long, and, as every one expected, was not satisfactory—the very life of Inness's work being in the suggestion which his own technical methods gave it. The connection, however, had a good result in giving us the only large etching of Mr. Inness's works. Mr. Eichelberger was an artistic and expert etcher, and has left this very monumental example of his skill.

PART THREE

MENTION of Inness's technical methods suggests the wisdom of recording them here, for those who find interest in such things, and for

STORM ON THE DELAWARE
THE CITY ART MUSEUM, ST. LOUIS







actual record, since, in the first place, I had full opportunity to witness his processes, and he was ever willing to talk about and explain them; and also they should be recorded because so much veritable trash is being signed with his name and sold falsely, that even an elementary knowledge of his methods should protect from much that masquerades as his—and, in passing, I may say it is an exceedingly difficult thing to imitate that erratic touch which could suggest so much.

Speaking broadly, Mr. Inness had two distinct methods of working, and they concerned the surface upon which he was at work, whether it was a new canvas or an old one, and this habit of working on old canvases cost the world many good pictures, because, often, when there was no canvas ready for him, and the idea he desired to express was hot within him, he painted on anything that was convenient, and, as in the Mount Washington picture, the older work was sacrificed to the new. One would think it might have been wise to keep his closets filled with canvases of the various sizes he was in the habit of using, for with him as with other painters there was a habit about such things.

In working upon a new canvas the subject was drawn in with a few bold strokes, the structure,

and principle underlying the theme being fully grasped, this was then stained in with due regard for breadth and light and shade, but the tones were not extremely varied nor was the full power of contrast sought. The pigment was always transparent and thinned with a vehicle—turpentine and Siccatif de Haarlem, or Siccatif de Cou-trey if he was in haste for the drying. As this stain set or grew tacky, it was rubbed and scrubbed into the canvas, lights were scratched out with thumb nail or brush handle, or wiped out with a rag—always modelling, drawing, developing in the most surprising manner; never for a moment at a loss for a form whether it were cloud, or tree, or weed, or figure of man or animal—they seemed to shape themselves at his touch, and the brush was spread with extreme force, as it scrubbed until in its scratching there developed wonderful growths of grass, or weeds or trees. As this color tightened in the drying, the forms were sharpened, limbs drawn with delicate but firm touch, with clear, thin color, terminations being accomplished with extreme care, for he knew as few have known the secret of character which rests in the terminations of various tree growths, and when this was not done well, either in his own or another's work, he called it "Stupid."

THE AFTERGLOW
COLLECTION OF CHARLES HUTCHINSON







The picture now being fully set, and the whole theme fairly pulsating with the vibrant, unctious flow of it all, for as yet there was no touch of opaque color, he would sharpen a few lights by scratching—perhaps with a knife, more often with the finger nail—add a note here and there of stronger color and stop for the time.

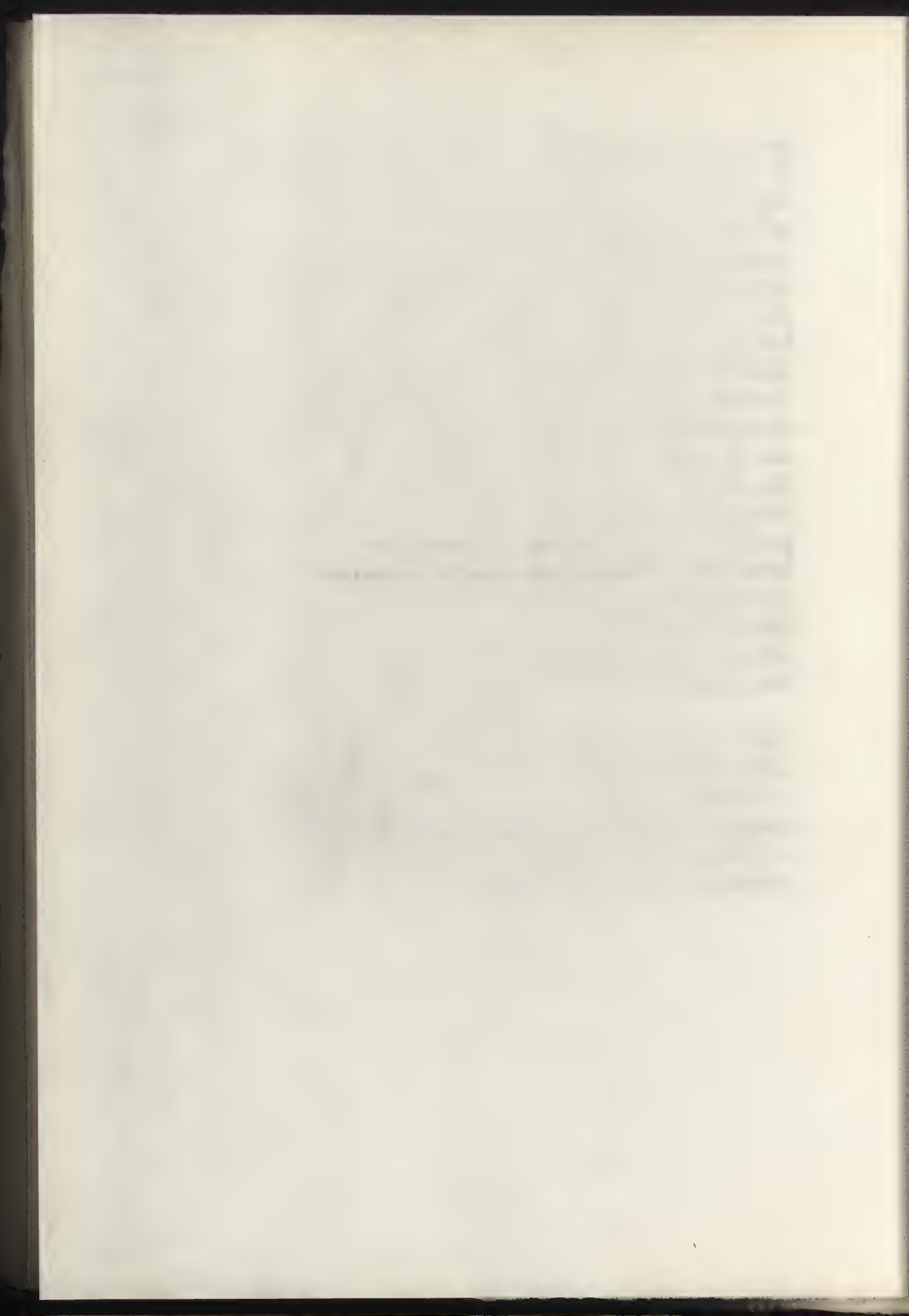
It will be seen that by this process a work had to be done at one continuous sitting—frankly at one time, and the energy he put into this method of starting a picture was amazing. Sometimes these canvases were so complete, and the suggestion so accurate both in point of color and value, that they were allowed to remain so. The most perfect example I know is the canvas now in the collection of Mr. Louis Ettlinger, called "Etretat," I have always had an idea that the French village had little to do with the picture, as it was done in his studio and apparently with no sketch for guidance, but titles matter little and the picture is a superb and perfect example of the craft of the master.

A group of painters were discussing methods of working in a studio adjacent to that of Mr. Inness. Presently he came in and took up the argument, forcibly, as was his habit. "You use too many colors," he said, "All that you need to

begin a picture with is yellow ochre, white and black. Give me a canvas and I'll show you." A new canvas about 20x30 inches in size was put upon the easel, and for something like an hour he painted, producing with broad rubs and masses, though very delicate in tint, a pulsating, tremulous bit of atmosphere. There was a pond with a mill, and tree on the far shore all rightly placed and felt, and executed with such ease and with such colorful effect, that all argument was silenced, each man feeling that he had received a lesson in painting of greatest importance. "Now, let me have a touch of blue and I'll finish it," said the old painter. With this a little space of sky was opened to the far ether—the water of the pond catching the reflection, and being better surfaced, the work was complete. The method was precisely that which has been described except that he used partially opaque colors. I have recently seen this picture and it has retained its original purity and strength quite perfectly.

There are at least two other examples which were allowed to remain in this transparent state. Mr. Inness had seen some pictures at a dealer's by Rousseau, evidently sketches, but held at great prices. He said, "I can do two of those in a day"—and he did. Working with an ease and certainty,

SUNSET AT MONTCLAIR
COLLECTION OF M. C. D. BORDEN







as well as with fierce energy, he painted two pictures of singular beauty—one I remember particularly—a deep, red-brown autumn subject, which was superb in color. The two pictures were sold next day to one man, and Inness laughed and said, “I’m going to hire out to paint by the day.”

When he took up a picture started in this transparent way to carry it on, he worked with great skill, and to me it was intensely interesting. He would first establish one or two crisp important notes of white, or pure color—and then with color not fully opaque he would state the lights in all the greater masses, gradually increasing the opacity until the composition became fully established in all its masses—the lights being opaque and shadows transparent. The sky would then be painted with more elaboration, and the picture allowed to dry. When taken up again, some great wash or rub of color would be spread all over it, and certain parts wiped out, the balance being manipulated with brushes which were little better than mops—but the master-hand controlled, and the result was a wealth of suggested detail. Sometimes this wash of transparent color would be allowed to dry, but more often the painter became impatient and “went at it” in the manner de-

scribed. It was, also, his theory that the final work should be done with skilful placings of grey—the middle tone of black and white. This he said gave that delicate top light which is so delightful in outdoor things. He often advised it for figure work, and sometimes would shut himself up with the model to make these experiments. I was never fortunate enough to see the results; that is, of figures done in the nude. There are many examples of his ability to do the draped figure very well, and his skill in "touching in" figures in his landscape was little short of marvelous—so balanced are they, and so truthfully enveloped in the atmosphere of the landscape.

He, perhaps, found the nude figure, with the controlling necessity for form, a tax upon patience. In landscape slight inaccuracies of form or placement are not of much importance, and the accidental is a very delightful thing to seize and appropriate, so long as suggestion and fitness are adhered to, but there can be no tampering with drawing in figure work—the pose once established, can not readily be altered. Begun as a figure, it remains so to the end, whether the result be fine or not. To a landscape man the translation of a broad, green meadow into a pond, the altering of a row of houses into trees, is but the matter

of a few moments and some well spread pigment. Inness always seemed of too impatient a nature to be a figure painter, and happily so for us.

There is an amusing story of this ability to translate a landscape into something quite different. A gentleman bought one of his pictures at an exhibition of the National Academy of Design. It was a delicate Spring landscape with cows grazing in the broad meadows. The picture was brought to Mr. Inness with the request to sharpen the drawing in the cows—they were little more than notes of color—I saw the picture in his studio quite early in the morning and admired it greatly. About three o'clock that afternoon he knocked loudly at my studio door, and I opened it to find him much excited, his eyes aflame and hair wild, but a happy, exulting look upon his face—"I've got it!" he said—"finest thing I've ever done! I followed principle from beginning to end, now all I've got to do is to go ahead and paint everything the same way!"

I went into his studio, and saw a stormy sunset, over a much torn, surf-broken ocean. Two black rocks were in the foreground, over which the sea pounded with the fury of hate, and a sky of purple, gold-lined clouds was fairly aflame. I caught my breath with a gasp—the thing was so

powerful. Then Inness said slyly, and with a twinkle in his eyes, "I guess I touched up his cows for him!" "What do you mean," I asked. "Why that's the picture you saw here this morning—it's better now isn't it?" Of course there was a scene when the owner came, but he was wise enough to take the new picture, although Inness told him he need not.

His belief that a picture always belonged to the artist who painted it, and that he should be privileged to do with it what he pleased in the interest of better art, would hardly be agreed with by owners in general, and such an erratic course as the above story illustrates might not always be so successful.

Swayed by his feelings, Mr. Inness was often misunderstood—indeed misrepresented. He was called selfish and conceited. Lesser men often said of him that his only interests were in his own pictures at the exhibitions, and that he could talk of nothing else. Enough has been said here to show that the personal interest was only intense so far as it might improve the work in hand—an interest that grew solely out of his desire to improve a work. Nay, many times when his conversation seemed to be full of praise for a work upon his easel, the listener might have remained to see the

SILVERY MORNING
COLLECTION OF EDWARD B. BUTLER







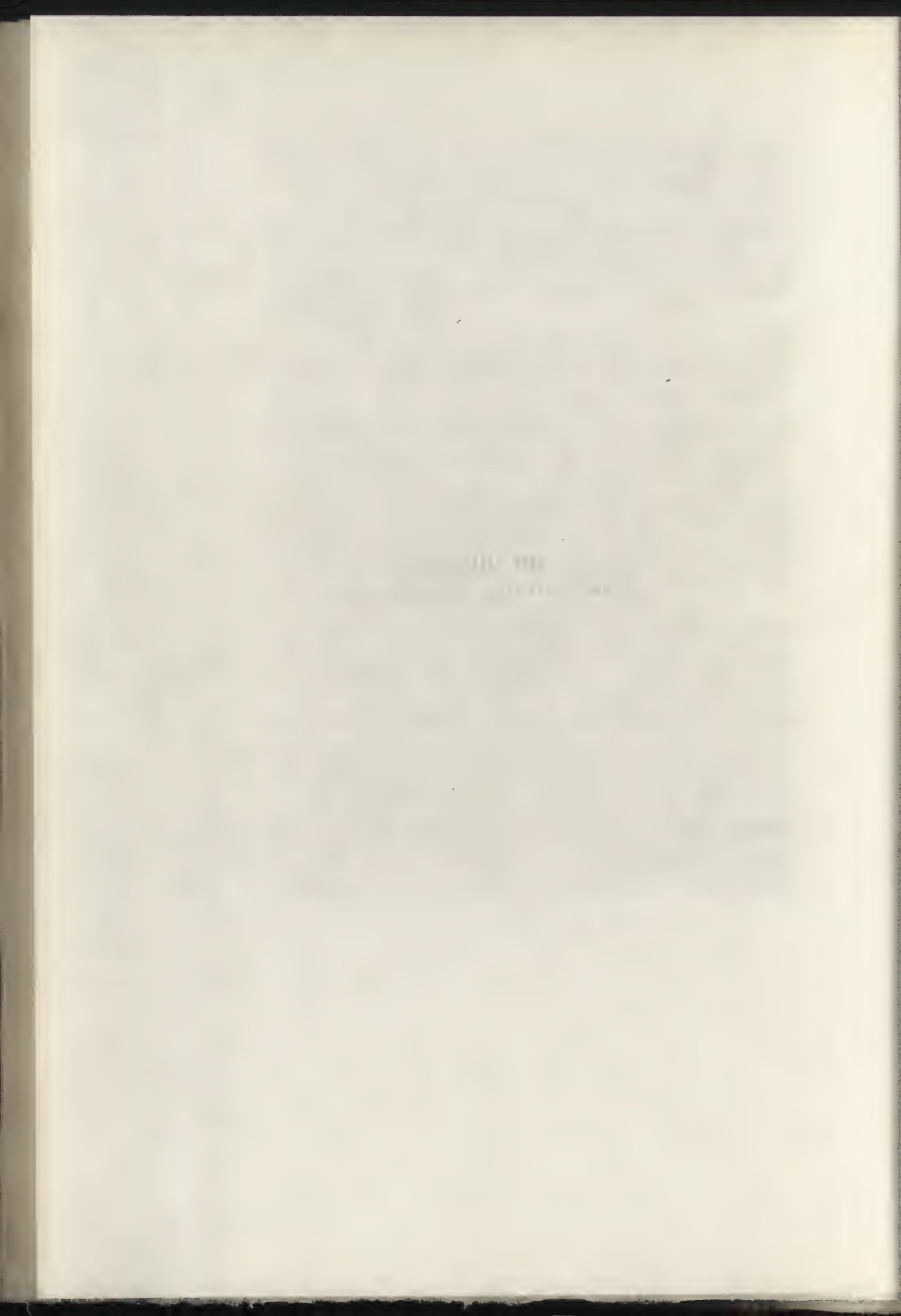
very admirable things repainted and the whole work undergo change in response to some impulse of his vigorous imagination and desire for improvement. That he was not selfish is splendidly shown in the incident which I had occasion to write about just after his death, and which I shall repeat here, because of its value in showing that side of his character, and because it is a very great happiness to tell the story again. It will be remembered that upon the first visit of Benj. Constant, the great French painter, he praised extremely the works of George Inness. There was the natural effect—the dealers all wished to secure fine examples of Inness's work, and he had many visitors and made numerous sales. I had the good fortune to paint a little picture which pleased him and which he bought from me in a very characteristic, impetuous way. Elsewhere I have told the story. Upon a morning soon after, there came a knock at my studio door and I found Mr. Inness with three other gentlemen whom he introduced, saying, "These men came to buy my pictures—I wouldn't have it, said they must buy yours, show them what you have!" My embarrassment was extreme and Inness's running fire of comment, criticism and dogmatic interference when prices were mentioned, were so significant of an

eager, high-strung character, that nothing more could be needed to show his breadth and generosity. The visit ended with the sale of eleven pictures to those buyers of his whom he was bodily turning over to me, and the prices were set by Inness himself. Surely such an act has no spark of selfishness in it!

At times he was very plain-spoken,—A young woman watching him work ventured to suggest that a certain note of red might be “echoed” in another part of the picture. The suggestion met the painter’s approval, and was done. Highly pleased with herself, the lady presently suggested another “echo” which was as absurd as the first chanced to be right,—“Echo be damned,” said Inness—“you don’t know what you are talking about!” and thereafter was let alone.

There was a vein of dry humor, also, in his “make up”—Being asked by a young woman, “Mr. Inness, what kind of a brush should I use to paint a sunset?” Inness replied, “A blacking brush, if you can get what you want with it!” At another time a painter who had very exhaustively elaborated a picture which he thought very successful, and also, very fine in color, asked Inness to come and see it. The old painter looked at it for a few minutes and then said,—“That’s all

THE MILL POND
THE CHICAGO ART INSTITUTE







right as far as it goes, now all you've got to do is to go ahead and paint it!"

Another story which I have often told is not without point, though the shaft was directed at me. I had painted a moonlight picture, with a line of rail fence running down to the foreground. Inness objected strongly to the fence. "Why can't I have the fence there if I want it?" said I. "You can," was the answer, "if you want to be a damned idiot!" I need not say the fence was painted out.

It must not be inferred from these stories that the painter was rough, or without sympathy—the contrary was the case, and his sympathies were easily aroused. But ever the dominant ambition for his art urged him on, his mind searching out problems, and grappling with them in a manner wholly original, often with a religious significance in the conclusions, but always with a shrewd bearing upon art. Many of these abstruse themes he would talk of in a fragmentary way, and generally protest that they were all written down and would be found among his papers. Alas! I fear his methods were not systematic in this, and an editor working with whatever care or love would have intense difficulty in bringing order out of the chaos which attended his writing

methods, since he would write part of a thought in this package of papers and the rest in another, knowing, doubtless, that he would be able to recognize it, and would at some future time bring them together, but for us they are probably lost.

His love of the "middle tone," and search for the law controlling it, was at all times interesting, and the day that he got hold of a law or principle which seemed to direct it, that moment he adopted and applied it. We who were near him knew this as the "blue phase" of his art. That is, he decided that a certain tone of blue was the middle register of the color scale, and at once every picture was given a bath of blue. He arrived at this middle tone law in this way: If a set of eight upright lines be drawn to represent an octave, sound will proceed from top to bottom in a spiral or vortexical movement connecting them, the initial or potential energy generating the sound will be greatest through the center of this spiral—hence the middle tone will ever be finest, strongest, purest. He pursued this thought, proving (to his own satisfaction at least) that in this movement one-tenth of the initial sound in each octave was lost—returned to the infinite—"the tithe of the ancients," he said.

Another principle which will be much disputed

and apparently often refuted, but one which led Inness into many of his most perfect successes, was his adherence to the idea that the sky should hold the middle tone of the picture—if too high, the tendency in the landscape portion was to lose color in blackness—if too low, to lose clarity, or luminosity in the color. In my own experience I have seen the wisdom of this dictum, and the treasure of it is in that word “luminosity”—since light will never be successfully found in white. The pigment itself carrying little impression of light to the eye, and as there is no intention or effort to produce light, the *impression* is the thing, and luminosity the much desired goal. Inness reached this by working within a gamut which enabled him to surround every particle of white with a luminous body, and the result is before you in the glow of his sunsets—the heat of his mid-day themes and the vivid light of his skies.

Mr. Inness loved the sunset hour and was master always of its subtleties. “When your color is in the distance,” he would say, “relieve your foreground in gray.” He painted it often with wide variation and changeable mood.

Sometimes the forces of tragedy were at work, with all the conflict of light and darkness, the roll of storm-cloud, and burst of fierce yellow blaze;

again, the glow fell away beyond the horizon, with swimming cloudlets tinged with the coppery red that is so lovely in nature, while high up in the clear ether hung the crescent moon. Though description fail, and photographs may only give us but a suggestion, there are always certain things which we may dwell upon in his pictures.

How glowing, full, and exuberant is the early canvas now in Mr. Borden's collection! The beautiful compositional form being so ample and yet so wisely balanced for the very expression of glowing sunset light—and in the other, owned by the same gentleman, how adequately we may study the development not only of the dramatic instinct of the man, but the technical richness of his brush and palette—the glory of the western sky—the precision of touch and color which quickens the little clouds into burning light. Your realism falls stale and flat in the presence of a fire-worshipper like this whose brush seems dipped in the sun. How surely, too, we may say that craftsmanship should be the vehicle of the soul's expression, else it is merely finger work, the handicraft of the artisan.

Fitful and many as were his moods, there was never a time when he let go of the great principle which guided him, that an artist's business is to

paint what he feels, rather than what he sees, mindful, however, that he must ever lay up knowledge by study, since by its use, only, can he express the qualities of Unity which are the qualities of Beauty.

PART FOUR

IN the art of Corot and Rousseau there are limitations both of color and theme, more perhaps in the work of Corot than Rousseau, and even in the Dutchmen whose influence so surely begot the men of 1830, there was a contentment in the effort to master a single phase of nature. The mention of Ruysdael brings us visions of leaping falls and broken water, the sombre tones of tree and rock lightened by the foam of rapids. In Hobbema the quiet rural theme under calm skies, and with little variant of tonality is characteristic, nor can we escape the silvery beauty of the springtime and early morning when Corot comes to mind; but with Inness his versatile genius allowed him to grasp the range of season and of Nature's moods—the storm and the calm—the tender grey and green of Spring with quite as delicate and subtle feeling as Corot—witness the “Wood Gatherers” in the Hearn collection, or the lovely “Silvery Morning” bought by Mr. Granberry at the Halsted sale

—a picture which stood for long upon the painter's easel and which he often spoke of as one of his finest works. Master, also, of the vividness of daylight or the subtle tenderness of moonlight, the range of his knowledge and of his palette seemed without limit. His easy adaptability to place and condition is but another way to speak of his versatility. The great study of "The Coast of Cornwall," now owned by Mr. John D. Crimmins, is indicative—so, also, the Florida studies and the "Georgia Pines."

In the first of these remarkable canvases, both of which are of the nature of direct pieces of painting, dependent upon no superimposed layers of color, glazes or other technical processes, Mr. Inness states his impression with a power that is unfaltering. The canvas shows us how intense was his emotional understanding, and we can imagine the old painter looking out upon this rock-bound coast, where for so many, many years the hidden rocks and the tremendous, treacherous seas have made league to take toll of those "who go down to the sea in ships," watching the tiny fishing craft return from the outer ocean to the harbor known of the fishers; and out of these impressions, in a moment of exaltation, a moment, if you will, of close sympathy with the strife of

elements, he calls up a vision for us of storm, sea, the rocky coast and hardy fishers, so real, so true that his emotions become ours. He passes on to us his impression of a great theme, plus the man himself, and lo! his vision becomes our vision. Surely this is Art, great Art!

The "Georgia Pines," perhaps equally fine as a technical achievement, is quite at the other extreme of the emotional scale. It is light, airy, gracious. Lyric would be the proper word. And as truly was it done under the inspiration of an extreme, if more delicate, emotion. The beautiful drawing of the trees, and their graceful groupings, the ethereal beauty of the sky, and the perfect registration of tones in the landscape give one an impression of lyric beauty that is very moving.

In this connection I wish, also, to recall a picture painted, I think, in Virginia, which Mr. Benj. Constant considered remarkable. It was called "A March Day," and its name was well merited in the cold bluster of the weather, splendidly felt and expressed in the picture.

These works, as I have said, show his adaptability to place, but it is in the Jersey fields and woods we shall think of him oftenest, and here he made his home and knew his environment.

At Niagara Inness seems more nearly to have

missed his genius. Intensely moved as he was, it is the more curious that his pictures of the great waterfall are not in themselves the splendid performances one would expect from such an exuberant mind; yet his sketches made on the spot are quite stirring and full of power.

If it be said of Inness that he was not a great painter in the sense of being a fine technician, that he could not handle the pigment with the charm which makes the performance of some men a delight, and leaves the student quite a-tremble at the virility, virtuosity—what you will—of the brush work, it may be admitted with no hurt to the master's repute, though even that question might be debatable on the ground that he used his paint in a way hitherto unknown, and that his processes tended rather to disguise than to expose the method; further, attention may be called to certain of the earlier things where the youthful mind, the eager muscles, and the sure grasp caused him to paint with a very great love of the use of materials, and they are very perfect works for students to study, since they are painted without trick or formula, and exhibit a mastery of material that few have equalled. Nowhere have I attempted to say that Inness was a man whose *methods* should be studied by the art student. On

THE WOOD GATHERER'S
COLLECTION OF GEORGE A. HEARN





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the contrary he should let it alone. But his art—the principles underlying his composition, the science of his balances and rhythm, his knowledge and taste in truth of sky, of tree form, of ground construction—these are matters that should arouse the liveliest interest, and which will reward the utmost study.

In examining a very beautiful sunset picture one day, the theme of which was a river running straight away into the picture, with the setting sun at the far perspective and richly reflected in the water, one of the observers said, "Mr. Inness, where did you get that subject?" "Oh!" said he, "I saw the sun setting at the end of my lane, one day in Montclair, and that was all I needed." Which story illustrates the imaginative control he ever had upon whatever impressed him. The fact was of little moment to him—the law, or the spirit underlying the fact, that was what interested and concerned him.

Only a master may dare to see things in this way, and it would be a dangerous course for a beginner to attempt translating lanes into rivers.

With the exception of the fine group of pictures recently given by Mr. Butler to the Chicago Art Institute there is not in any one of our Museums or public galleries an adequate showing of

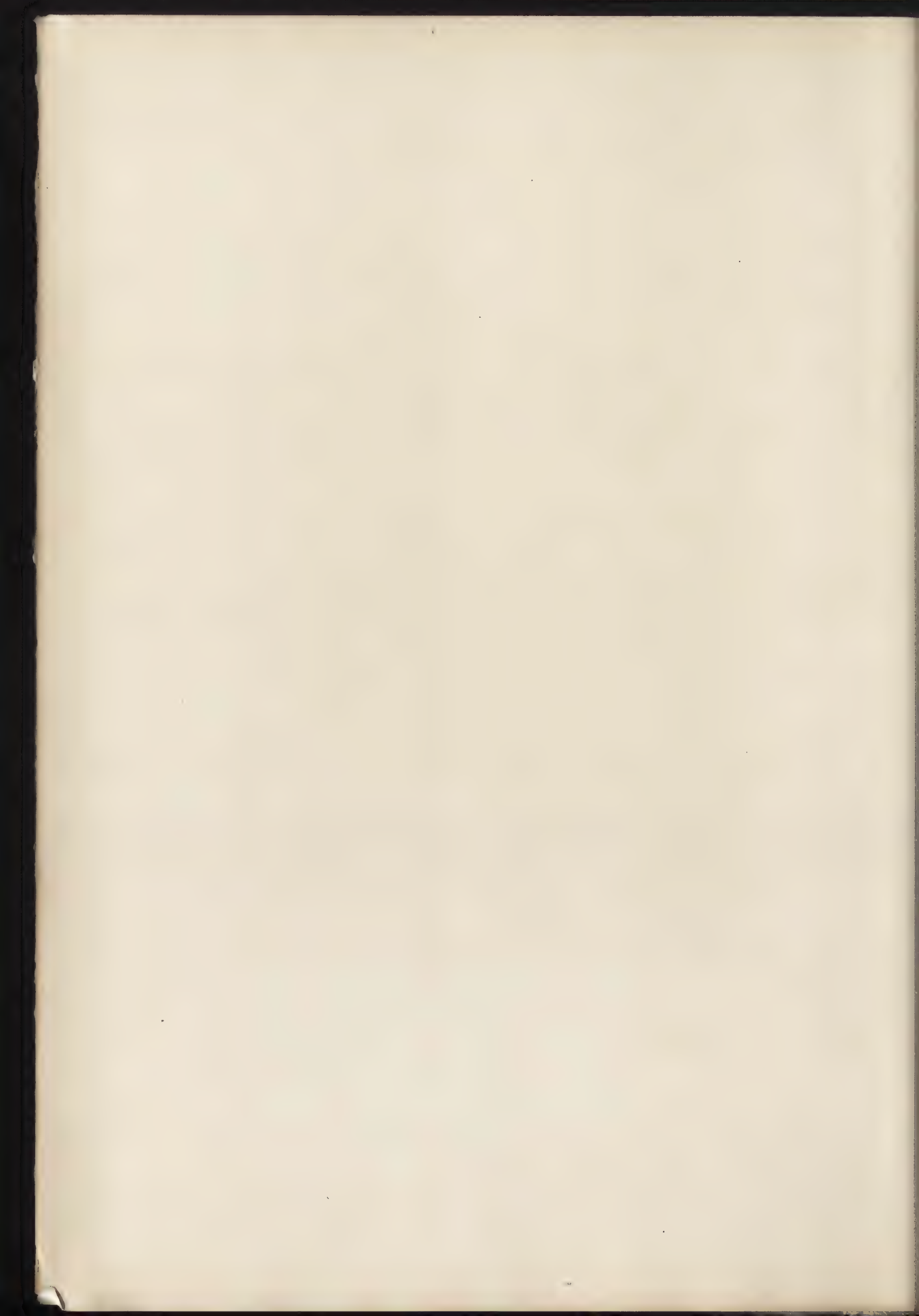
Mr. Inness's work, and this lack is to be explained only by the general failure to fully estimate him at his real worth. In this very regard there is a rapid change taking place, and we hope soon to see, supplementing those works already in the Hearn collection at the Metropolitan Museum, and in the Museum's own, a greater, more perfectly selected group of the master's canvasses—arranged chronologically—showing that initial style which I have tried to indicate here, and ranging through all those phases which most perfectly express his ablest work, up to the synthetic, or latest phase of his labor. Such a room would become a National pride and should not long be omitted here, where more nearly than elsewhere we may hope one day to have an American "Louvre."

His had been a life of hard work, of intense application, and as in many other cases, with the passing years he became more and more synthetic; from the careful analytical reasoner, he became the synthecist, and more and more he sought expression in great waves of color—occasional forceful expressions would break from him when color and form were perfectly balanced, but with the approach of the end he seemed to lose himself in the musical influence which color gives to some minds, and, while beautiful, they bear

SUNSET
COLLECTION OF M. C. D. BORDEN

THE END OF THE WORLD





only a relative connection with that which is best in his work.

In the contemplation of this synthetic phase of his work, the picture which comes oftenest to my mind is one now somewhat crudely called "Threatening" and which I have recently had the opportunity to examine very carefully. At the outset the picture was intended to be a storm, with stress of wind sweeping over a wooded valley. In the foreground—a hill on which grew an apple orchard—there was a sheep-fold with one or two stray sheep. Then for the sake of a strong note a black stallion was added (magnificent creature: I have always lamented the passing of that stallion with his noble, defiant air); soon this was painted out, as if the painter could not endure the very strength of the animal. When later on he took up the canvas, his own strength was failing and his mind seeking expression in color-waves; the picture was one of the last he worked upon, and it has that brooding, mystic beauty which is portentous. It is not too sad—there is promise of light behind the cloud—but the day is done; though the light shine, soon the night will follow. As if the painter were saying to us,—“I too, am passing over the valley, there are no thunderings and lightnings, only the shadow and the mist; behind

the veil there is great peace in the golden light of a far away shore!"

He died at the Bridge of Allan in Scotland, in 1894, where he had gone for rest and recuperation. One may say, in full harness, as a soldier loves to die, he turned from his easel to pass into those Elysian fields where we may be very sure he was welcomed by the galaxy of those who have worked well here on earth, a companion and an equal with the highest, and for us the legacy of his work is veritable treasure, the more precious as the years go by, when, freed from the stress and strain of life's activities in less noble walks, we come to contemplate those finer things which are the works of the spirit, the imperishable gifts of men of genius!

PART FIVE

I DO NOT know that there could be a more fitting method of completing a work which is intended to be a record, than a final chapter of phrases chosen from the sayings of this great painter, which convey his trend of thought, his ideas of art—however briefly they may be expressed, sometimes not more than an epigram—and those canons which come to us now as almost

inspired advice. With this in mind, I print these words from the very lips of the artist.

"The overlove of knowing is a chronic trouble with artists, and produces in their works the appearance of effort and labor instead of that freedom which is the life of Truth."

"Knowledge must bow to Spirit."

"The memory is the daguerreotype stop of the soul, which treasures all that God creates to consciousness through eye and touch. What we painters have to learn is to keep the stop closed in the presence of Nature, to see and not think we see;—when we do this our eyes are lighted from within, and the face of Nature is transformed, and we teach the world to see reality in a new light. Such is the mission of Art."

"Our intelligence is occupied with the contemplation of Effects. It should be occupied with the contemplation of the Cause. In this case art would cease to be mere imitation. Through the representation of forms its purpose would be to communicate intelligence."

"A bit of old-fashioned inspiration says,—'Give me understanding and I will keep thy law.' Understanding is a spiritual foothold, fixed upon and mastering the sense."

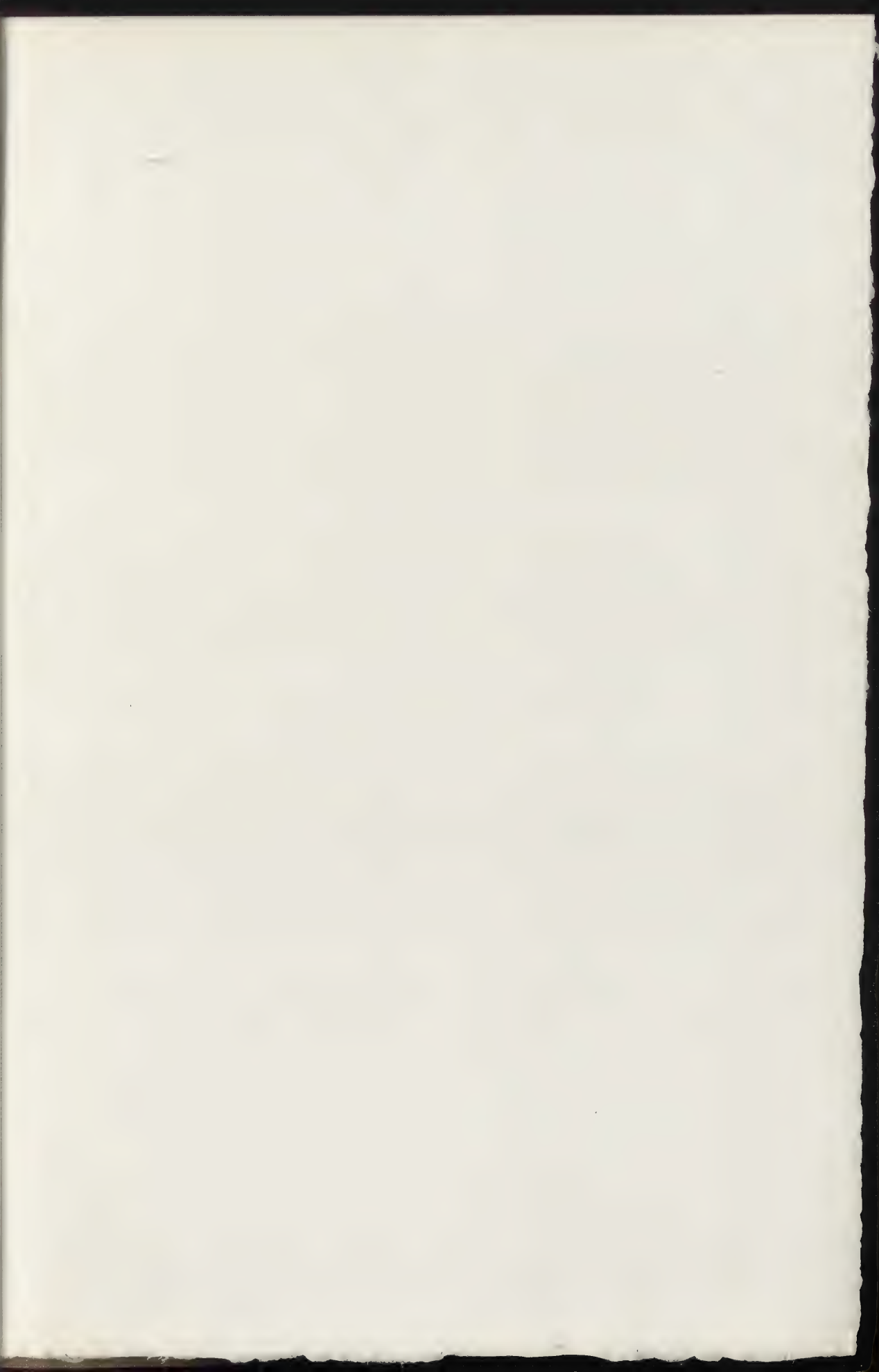
“The paramount difficulty with the artist is to bring his intellect to submit to the fact that there is such a thing as the indefinable which hides itself that we may feel after it. But God is always hidden, and Beauty depends upon the unseen—the Visible upon the invisible.”

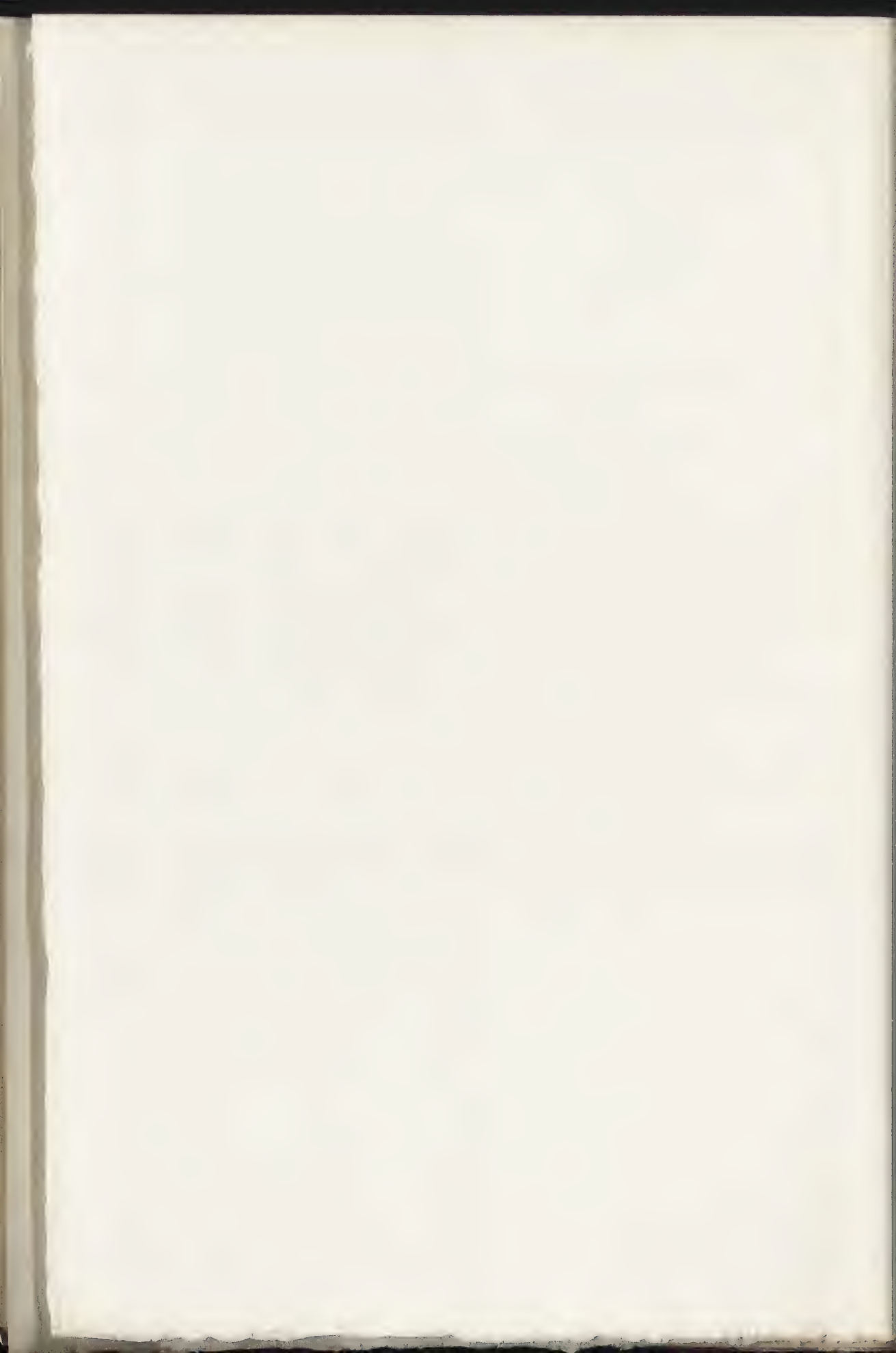
“Let us believe in art not as something to gratify curiosity or suit commercial ends, but something to be loved and cherished, because it is the handmaid of the Spiritual life of the Age.”

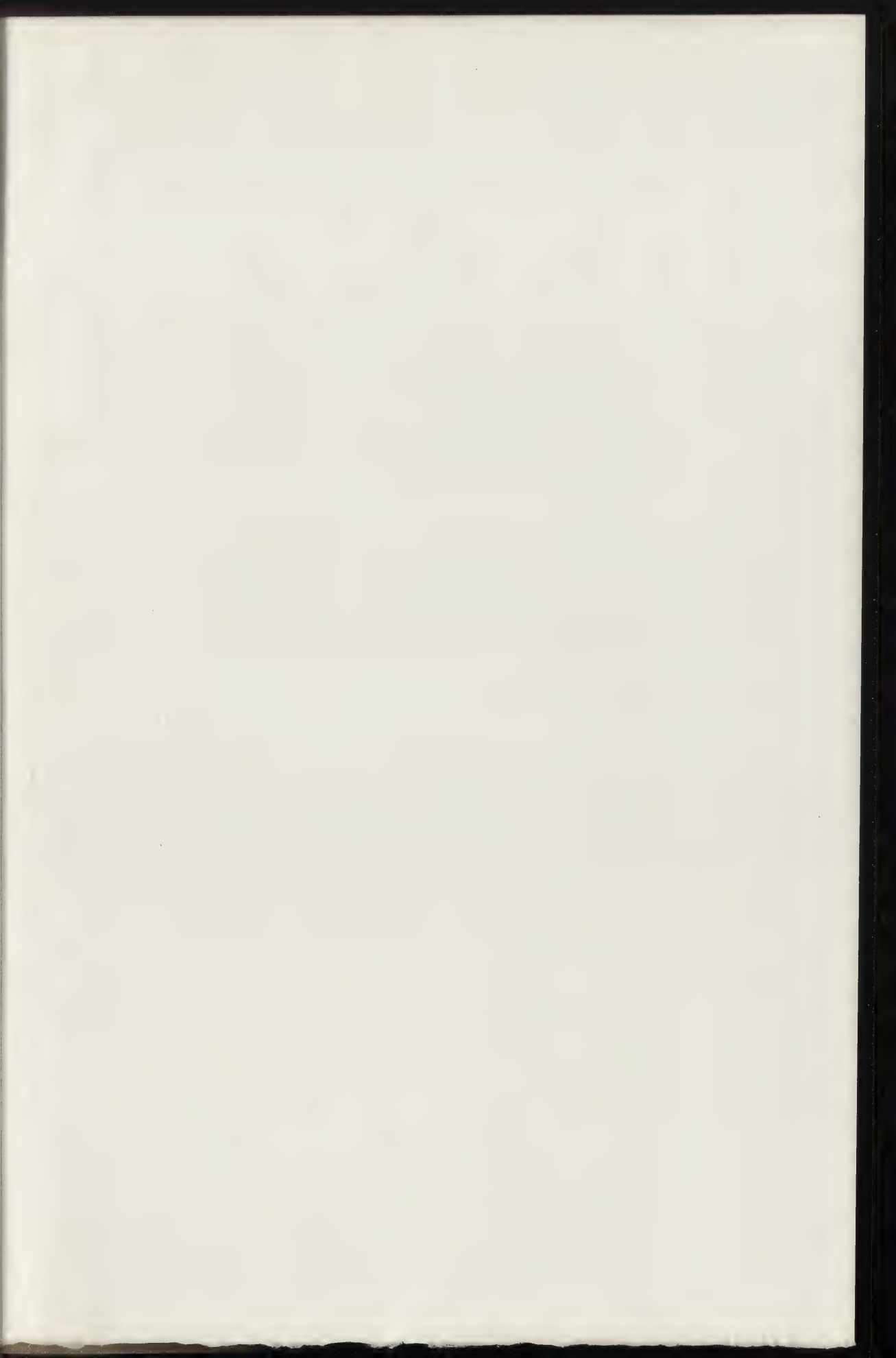
“We can not be impressed by that which does not touch us.”

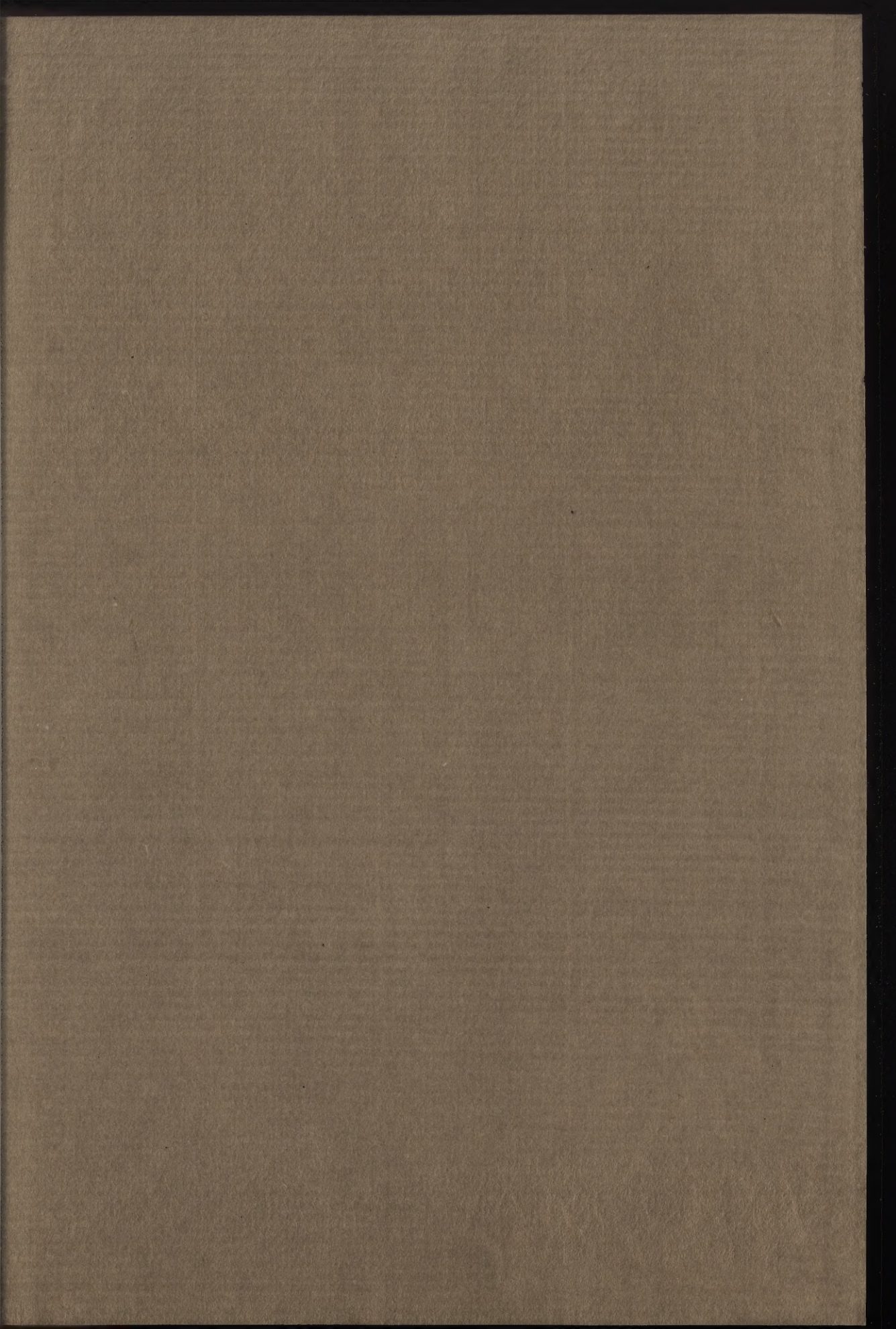
The brain in which these thoughts were created is stilled, the voice which uttered them is silent,—but in his art there can never be silence, for it is the very voice of Genius speaking to the hearts of the people.

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